



Media Release

Delta Riparian Water Users Report Reducing Diversions by 32 Percent Last Summer

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Delta riparian water users who voluntarily agreed to cut back their water diversions by 25 percent last summer surpassed their goal, reporting a 32 percent reduction. The group of Central and South Delta farmers agreed to voluntary cuts to reduce drought-induced stress on the State's water system and to avoid the risk of more drastic curtailment.

"This is an example of how the agricultural community and regulators can work together in times of need to achieve common sense water management objectives without the need for mandatory orders," said Delta Watermaster Michael George. "Riparian water right claimants were able to gain a measure of regulatory certainty allowing them to plan and plant their crops, while helping to relieve pressure on the State's water system during a critical period."

Responding to the drought, and expressing a desire to "share the pain," representatives of Delta farmers proposed the Voluntary Diversion Reduction Program last spring. In exchange for an agreement that they would not face enforcement of potentially deeper cuts to their riparian claims, the farmers voluntarily submitted plans to reduce diversions in the 2015 growing season by 25 percent compared to 2013. Farmers were required to submit reports on implementation of the plans by Nov. 1.

Farmers in the Central and South Delta submitted 217 voluntary diversion reduction plans to the State Water Board's Delta Watermaster, enrolling 180,119 acres. Most of the diversions in the Delta are estimated rather than measured, so statistics are difficult to verify, but participants reported diverting approximately 153,670 fewer acre feet of water compared to 2013, a 32 percent reduction.

Farmers employed a variety of methods to achieve the reduced diversions, including fallowing land, growing less water-intensive crops, reducing irrigation, changing irrigation methods and reconfiguring fields to increase efficiency.

The Delta Watermaster conducted field inspections throughout the growing season to verify compliance with the voluntary plans, starting with the larger farm operations, and later in the season, the smaller farms. The verification was augmented with spot checks of satellite images and cross checks with reports of plan implementation.



Curtailments of riparian water rights were narrowly avoided in the San Joaquin River watershed last summer, possibly due in part to the reduction in Delta diversions.

Farmers took pride in the program, and several requested inspections of their fields so their efforts would be understood and documented. Some farmers conducted irrigation experiments to test ideas about the interplay of soil, water, nutrients and energy.

Byron-Bethany Irrigation District filed a legal challenge to the voluntary program, challenging the State Water Board's authority to waive enforcement of potential curtailment orders, and contending that the State Water Board was obligated to examine the underlying riparian water rights of each of the participants. That complaint is still pending.

The Delta Watermaster's report on the Voluntary Diversion Reduction Program can be viewed [here](#).

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